



Williamson "Wick" Murray

Williamson "Wick" Murray

Professor Emeritus, The Ohio State University



"The Iraqi Side of the Hill "

Thursday, May 4, 2006
3:30 p.m.
Mershon Center
Room 120



This lecture is open to the public. Kindly RSVP to [Beth Russell](#), no later than Tuesday, May 2, 2006.

Williamson Murray graduated from Yale University in 1963 with honors in history. He then served five years as an officer in the United States Air Force, including a tour in Southeast Asia with the 314th Tactical Airlift Wing (C-130s). He returned to Yale University where he received his Ph.D. in military-diplomatic history, working under Hans Gatzke and Donald Kagan. He taught two years in the Yale history department before moving on to Ohio State University in fall 1977 as a military and diplomatic historian. Together with Allan R. Millett, he co-founded the OSU Military History Program. He received the Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award in 1987. He took early retirement from Ohio State in 1995 as Professor Emeritus of History.

Murray has taught at a number of other institutions, including the Air War College, the United States Military Academy, and the Naval War College. He has also served as a Secretary of the Navy Fellow at the Navy War College, the Centennial Visiting Professor at the London School of Economics, the Matthew C. Horner Professor of Military Theory at the Marine Corps University, the Charles Lindbergh Chair at the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum, and the Harold K. Johnson Professor of Military History at the Army War College. He is currently a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Defense Analysis and a member of the National Strategic Studies Group.

Murray has written a wide selection of articles and books. He is the author of *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939*, *The Path to Ruin* (Princeton University Press, 1984); *Luftwaffe* (Nautical and Aviation Press, 1985); *German Military Effectiveness* (Nautical and Aviation Press, 1992); *The Air War in the Persian Gulf* (Nautical and Aviation Press, 1995); and *Air War, 1914-1945* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1999). He has edited with Allan Millett a number of books on the implications of the past for current military thinking, including *Military Effectiveness*, three volumes (Allen and Unwin, 1988); *Calculations, Net Assessment and the Coming of World War II* (Free Press, 1992); and *Military Innovations in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge, 1996). Murray has also edited, with MacGregor Knox, *The Making of Strategy, Rulers, States, and War* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050* (Cambridge, University Press, 2001). Murray and Millett have published (May 2000) an operational history of World War II, *A War To Be Won, Fighting the Second World War* (Harvard University Press), which already has received rave reviews from a number of newspapers and journals, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Naval War College Review*, *The Journal of Military History*, and *Strategic Review*. Murray's most recent book, *The Iraq War, A Military History* (Harvard University Press, 2003), written with Major General Robert Scales, Jr., has also received excellent reviews.

Some of Murray's most recently published articles include "Clausewitz Out, Computer In, Military Culture and Technological Hubris," *The National Interest*, Summer 1997; "Air War in the Persian Gulf: The Limits of Air Power," *Strategic Review*, Winter 1998; "Preparing to Lose the Next War?," *Strategic Review*, Fall 1998; "Does Military Culture Matter?," *Orbis*, Winter 1999; "The

Emerging Strategic Environment, An Historian's View," *Strategic Review*, Spring 1999; "Military Culture Matters," *Strategic Review*, Summer 1999; and "Military Experimentation in the Interwar Period," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Spring 2000. At present besides working as a defense consultant in Washington, Murray is working on a book dealing with the ability of military institutions to adapt to the challenging conditions of combat.

When American forces took over Saddam Hussein's palaces and ministries during the invasion of 2003, they also captured all of Iraq's government documents. Although these documents shed light on many features of Saddam's regime and the events that transpired in the region during his rule, U.S. government officials have paid surprisingly little attention to them.

Williamson Murray, professor emeritus of history at The Ohio State University, argues that ignoring Saddam's government documents has been a serious mistake. Murray is part of a team of scholars at the U.S. Naval Academy engaged in translating these documents from Arabic and making them available in the National Archives.

As official products of the Iraqi bureaucracy, Williamson says, these government documents not only contain many unknown details about the nature of Saddam's regime and its policies, but also might have helped the United States bolster its case for war and its legal case against Saddam Hussein for war crimes. It is also useful to understand the Iraqi perspective, both from a theoretical and practical perspective, and how events are perceived on the "other side of the hill."

Williamson described some of the considerable difficulties his team has encountered in translating the Iraqi government documents – difficulties that he said illustrate the universal incompetence of bureaucracy. First, the military and political organizations of the Iraqi government and Baath Party produced a great deal of useless propaganda. Second, the U.S. bureaucracy argued that the United States did not own these documents, and the question had to be sorted out before the team's translation work could continue.

Although much of the Iraqi material is sheer propaganda whose sole aim is to exalt Saddam as a brilliant leader universally loved and respected by the people of his country, other documents give valuable insight into Saddam's regime and his policies. In this way, Williamson said, the documents help us glean the Iraqi regime's view of the external world and its true intentions at critical junctures.

One key insight concerns Saddam's military preparation on the eve of the Iraq war. The documents make clear that Iraqi leaders expected not a U.S. invasion but a major counter-insurgency. The United States, they thought, was afraid to fight Iraq directly, but instead preferred to instigate rebellion. Iraq's reasons for believing this went back to the first Gulf War in 1991, when the United States fell short of not only marching all the way to the capital city, Baghdad, but also of entering the Basra region in 1991. Instead, the US chose to instigate Shi'ite rebellions, which in fact nearly brought down Saddam's regime. Thus, Iraqi leaders feared a similar serious rebellion in 2003, and one that could erupt simultaneously in many provinces, and with disastrous consequences for the regime.

To meet this perceived internal threat, Iraq strengthened local Baath organizations militarily. The local armed forces would function to prevent a rebellion before it grew and spread rather than engage in fighting foreign invasion. In fact, Saddam's fear of a coup or resurrection was so great that he made sure no connections were in place between these local armed forces, so that they could not band together in a coup against him. Thus, after the U.S. invasion, an insurgency emerged in Iraq against U.S. occupation not because these forces were connected, but in fact because they were very disconnected.

The Iraqi government documents showed how out of touch Saddam was in reading not only U.S. power but any outside power and global events that transpired. Because the United States did not commit ground forces against Serbia during the Kosovo crisis, the Iraqi regime concluded that the United States not a real superpower, but a paper tiger. And because the reward for telling the truth under Saddam's regime was often death, Iraqi military officers were highly reluctant to report the gravity of their situation. As a result, Iraqis insisted they were winning the war as late as April 2003 and even decided against seeking a ceasefire at the United Nations.

Documents also show that the Iraqi regime was ignorant of history, Williamson said. Every adverse development in the history of the Middle East was attributed to an international Jewish conspiracy. The regime was also ruthless against dissidents, opponents and anyone who dared not to accept its version of events and history. In this way, Saddam held fractious society together, albeit with force and fear.

The Iraqi regime strove above all to establish its leadership in the Arab world, Williamson said. According to the Iraqi government documents, one of Saddam's main motivations for Iraq's ferocious war with Iran was to gain prestige in the eyes of Arabs.

After the campaign in the east, Saddam planned to turn west and create a unified Arab world. Saddam believed that a unified Arab world would be as strong as the United States and achieve superpower status on the world stage. However, things did not go according to Saddam's plan: Iraq's war against Iran did not end in victory and the Arabs failed to rally around Iraq.

Another result of Saddam's Arab unification policy was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is generally seen as an attempt by Saddam to fix his finances. But Williamson said that Iraqi official documents show Saddam was in fact actively seeking a confrontation with the United States because he thought America would be defeated and hence forced to quit the Middle East. In fact, at the end of 1991, though it may seem bizarre, the Iraqis were under the impression that they had stood up to the United States and won.

In sum, Williamson said, the Iraqi official documents reveal the full extent of Saddam's megalomania, his regime's utter lack of grasp of reality and its poor reading of history. The documents also provide insight into Saddam's reliance on fear and repression as a means of maintaining power. With regard to foreign policy, they help us understand the true intentions behind Saddam's seemingly provocative actions.

But, Williamson said, on perhaps the most important question – whether Saddam possessed weapons of mass destruction – the documents are ambiguous. One problem is the nature of the regime. Even if Iraq didn't have WMDs, Iraqi leaders often spoke as if they did. The Iraqi documents show that because of U.N. inspections, Saddam's regime was engaged in destroying WMDs in the 1990s, and it is now clear that the regime did not possess WMDs on the eve of the U.S. invasion. But the Iraqi documents also show Saddam intended to acquire WMDs once sanctions against Iraq came to an end, a potential threat to the United States and the region.